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Introduction

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1 Introduction by guest editors

In his recent book, "The better angels of our nature: why violence has declined," Steven Pinker (2011) proposes a retrospection of the history of violent behavior, and presents substantial evidence on the decline of all types of violence over time ever since humankind has kept track of data. This decline can be seen in such diverse facts as the decreasing number of war casualties, the abolition of public executions and capital punishments in a growing number of countries, or the fall in homicide rates.

With regards to armed conflict, i.e., "a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths" (Gleditsch et al. 2002), Joshua Goldstein (2011) endorses this reading of history. Ultimately and in conclusion, the viewpoints of both Pinker and Goldstein reflect a widespread conception of the evolution of the human being towards a more sociable and cooperative species. And in fact, the figure below on the frequency of armed conflicts between 1946 and 2012 (Gleditsch et al. 2002) undoubtedly reveals a downward trend in the incidence of this particular form of violence at least since the end of the Cold War.

Having said that, violence, disputes, and, more generally, threats to human security persist, casting some doubt over these rather optimistic perspectives of Pinker (2011) or Goldstein (2011). For instance, such dreadful events like the Rwanda genocide are not reported in the numbers underlying Figure 1. Moreover, the ongoing Syrian civil war is likely to have somewhat caused a reversal of the conflict-decline tendency, even if temporarily only. And, finally, statistics on the onset and frequency of armed conflicts fail to capture the increasingly heavy

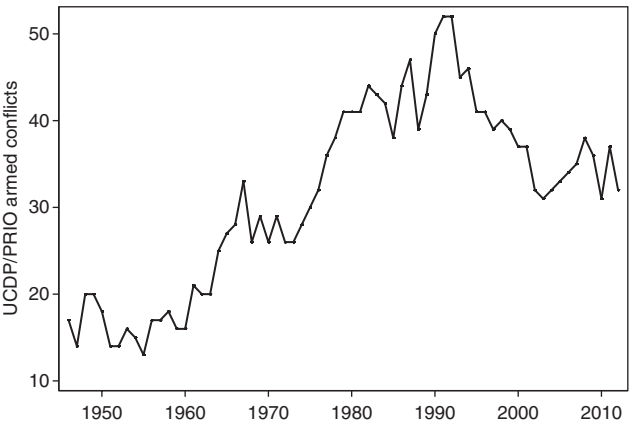

Figure 1: UCDP/PRIO armed conflict frequency per year, 1946–2012.

burden suffered by civilian populations, whether in terms of displacements, diseases, food shortages, poverty, or child mortality. Leaving such caveats aside and taking the decrease in violence for granted, the downward trend pointed to above may well be quickly reversed in a world of rising scarcities and increasing inequalities (Collier 2007; Homer-Dixon 1999).

This short overview, while arguably being selective and certainly not comprehensive, also demonstrates the contemporary complexity of peace and security (see also Collins 2012; Snyder 2011). Scholars and policymakers alike define these two concepts no longer merely as the absence of violence. The set of actors involved in providing security or threatening peace still comprises the nation state as the principal force, while non-governmental organizations, civil society groups, terrorist organizations, or rebel groups substantially exert an influence in contemporary security studies as well now. Finally, factors that may only marginally or indirectly affect individuals', communities', groups', or entire states' security increasingly become the focus of scholarly and practitioners' attention. Prominent examples here pertain to environmental factors such as climate change, mass migration, or economic crises.

The annual meeting of the Network of European Peace Scientists (NEPS)[1] provides an important forum to study peace and security issues broadly and from an interdisciplinary lens. In the words of Bove and Ruggeri (2012, 2), the guest

1 http://www.europeanpeacescientists.org/.

editors of last year's Proceedings to the NEPS Annual Conference, this network comprises "peace scientists committed to the advancement of peace research in Europe and includes scholars from a variety of disciplines such as economics, political science, regional science, mathematics, and history." As such, the NEPS seeks to address the evidently complex challenges of peace and security studies at present time – not only for gaining a better understanding of the underlying causes and consequences of peace and conflict, but also for providing thorough solutions to the problems at hand.

In our role as guest editors, and with the outstanding help of multiple reviewers to whom we express our sincere gratitude, we are proud to introduce a selection of *Letters* in this special issue of *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy*. These *Letters* are based on research that has been presented at the last annual conference of the NEPS that was held in Milan, June 24–26 2013. Taken together, and not surprisingly, the contributions to this special issue follow the exceptional approach of the NEPS by studying the causes and consequences of conflict and peace from diverse theoretical perspectives, with different regional emphasis, and with various methodological approaches. Ultimately, it is our hope and firm belief that the insights gained by this research may help in promoting peace and security worldwide.

In more detail, the first three *Letters* of this special issue focus on concepts and factors in international relations that have gained substantial attention over the past few decades – yet, and as demonstrated by these contributions, we still lack substantial knowledge here. Corbetta, Volgy, and Rhamy (2013) make both a theoretical and empirical contribution to our understanding of political relevance and major powers. These authors argue that major power states differ in their probability for political interaction based on whether they are status consistent, status inconsistent overachievers, or status inconsistent underachievers. Thus, politically relevant dyads may differ depending on the status consistency of the major power they contain. Grandi (2013), moreover, examines the aftermath of armed conflicts and thereby contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of post-conflict violence. She introduces a typology that is based on two axes: strategic aims and degrees of cooperation. The premise of this categorization is that with a more solid grasp of the mechanisms driving post-conflict violence and its variation, we can design more suitable policies to lower its incidence. Finally, Midlarsky and Midlarsky (2013) study protracted intrastate conflict and move beyond the regularly used rational paradigms. To this end, the authors bring in the analysis emotions such as hatred and revenge, and develop a theory of anger as a response to deceit and how these concepts may be mapped into excessive risk-taking. Such elements are certainly crucial in understanding the occurrence of seemingly irrational conflicts.

Four *Letters* of this special issue explore the determinants of various forms of extremism, whether related to state-sponsored acts of extreme violence, to terrorism, or to religious extremism. Ferrero (2013) places mass killings in a continuum of actions that a ruling power can take to remove an unwanted group from a society. The author develops a model of input choice geared to cost minimization and then provides us with extensive historical anecdotal evidence backing his theory. Malecková and Stanišić (2013) examine the association between education and terrorism. The authors find that the share of highly educated people in a country is significantly correlated with the number of international terrorist acts carried out by individuals or groups from that country. Third, Boehmer and Daube (2013) have a similar focus by studying the impact of economic development on domestic terrorism. The authors argue that states at intermediate levels of development go through socioeconomic changes that result when modern economic relations replace traditional economies. This, in turn, may lead to grievances and social mobilizations conducive to terrorism. Finally, Sing and Singh Bedj (2013) present an anthropology that explains how and why piracy and Islamism emerged under certain conditions in Somalia. The authors propose a regional lens for the analysis of Somali crime and governance and argue that Somali pirates and Islamists, contrary to mainstream discourse, are antagonists.

Another series of *Letters* focuses on the institutional factors favoring or containing the emergence of violence. In line with the recurrent attention being given to climate change and environmental depletion, Exenberger and Pondorfer (2013) links climate change and mass violence in the context of contemporary Africa. Most substantially, the author combines projections about the future development of agricultural production with an assessment of institutional risk factors for sub-Sahara African states. Ultimately, this allows us to identify countries of joint risk. Kuperman (2013) introduces the project on Constitutional Design and Conflict Management (CDCM) in Africa. The CDCM aimed initially to identify the domestic political institutions in African countries that are likely to moderate, or exacerbate, instability. Based on his research, Kuperman (2013) recommends promoting gradual reform of Africa's existing, centralized constitutional designs by counter-balancing them with liberal institutions, especially the separation of powers – including a strong parliament, independent electoral commission, and judicial review. In their *Letter*, Carlson and Dacey (2013) present a formal model of the effects of domestic constraints upon crisis initiation and crisis termination. The model has intriguing implications for the empirical analysis of international and domestic interactions, and crisis initiation in particular.

Finally, the last set of *Letters* combines economics and peace studies, and investigate the consequences of war and military investment on institutional and economic factors such as economic growth, state capacity, and the organization

of society at large. First, Bassil (2013) examines the pre- and post-conflict impact of the Lebanese civil war on this country's economy between 1977 and 2011. The results show that war and terrorism have had indeed a negative effect on the economy. The author also presents a series of forecasts for the period 2012 to 2018 based on alternative scenarii likely to occur. Second, Chowdhudry and Syed Murshed (2013) concentrate on the effect of war on state fiscal capacity in developing countries. The authors' research highlights that war hampers the development of state, and more particularly fiscal capacity, along with poor governance, oil dependence, and macroeconomic mismanagement. Andreou, Zombanakis, and Migiakis (2013) contribute to literature by assessing the impact of defense-procurement spending on the growth rate of the Greek economy using artificial neural networks. The main conclusion drawn in the case of the Greek economy in general and during austerity times in particular is that defense-procurement is considerably inflexible concerning both increases and reductions. Finally, Wintrobe (2013) extends his previous contributions to the political economy of dictatorships to analyze in depth the evolution of the North Korean regime while the rest of the world has being experiencing fundamental changes such as the collapse of the Soviet Union, or the market reforms implemented in China. This paper explains the consequent substantial militarization of North Korea and puts in perspective the stability of the regime.

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